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ABSTRACT

This paper argues that, for both practical and philosophical reasons, high school activities ought to be managed by participatory principles. It further argues that the responsibility for bringing this about belongs to principals and activities directors through appropriate modeling and in-service education. In addition, obstacles to the implementation of such practices are identified and means of removing them outlined. The paper first describes how high school activities need to be managed within single "activities" department and referred to as co-curricular and not extra-curricular. It defends the importance of activities (including athletics) to schooling and why it should model participatory strategies rather than authoritative. Reasons are given for applying democratic principles to activities management and why it is the right thing to do. Next, the paper addresses the educating of co-curricular leaders about the merits of democratic management. The single greatest barrier to the implementation of participatory principles in activities is the widely held but grossly inaccurate image of activities--particularly athletics. In using business as an example of empowering workers, examples are given to illustrate how coaches and advisors of activities can benefit from this understanding through in-service effort. Further examples of athletic coaches using participatory strategies reinforce this notion. The paper then addresses the reasons beyond effectiveness for adapting participatory strategies to activities. In addition to modeling democratic principles, participatory activities are more likely to teach both responsibility and creativity. Finally, the paper elaborates on how democratically managed activities are consistent with research on effective schools. (Author/RR)

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PARTICIPATORY MANAGEMENT OF CO-CURRICULAR ACTIVITIES

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ABSTRACT

The following essay argues that, for both practical and philosophical reasons, high school activities ought to be managed by participatory principles. It further argues that the responsibility for bringing this about belongs to principals and activities directors through appropriate modeling and in-service education. In addition, obstacles to the implementation of such practices are identified and means of removing them outlined.

Participatory Management of Co-Curricular Activities

High school coaches and activity advisors who apply participatory management principles to their programs will be far more effective in the 90's and beyond than those who do not. Activities leaders need the will and the skill to empower all their stakeholders, particularly students but also assistants, parents and community. There is simply no reason to expect that authoritarian models, attitudes or strategies will be any more productive in activities management than they have been in business, politics and other areas of education. Trends in each suggest that those who are either unable or unwilling to incorporate significant collaboration into their activities will experience increasing frustration and probable failure. The challenge facing principals and activities directors is to educate the unable and to motivate the unwilling to adopt, then apply to their programs, the kind of participatory attitudes responsible for revolutionizing the modern world. Essential to working with both groups are modeling and relevant in-service education.

Principals and activities directors who expect coaches and advisors to be participative managers need to model that expectation by implementing appropriate organizational strategies.

First, all high school activities need to be managed within a single 'activities' department and referred to as co-curricular, not extracurricular. To the best of their ability, administrators need to discourage distinctions between athletic and nonathletic activities and to stress, through their designation as co-curricular, their educational value. The most important responsibility of the high school **athletic** administrator is advocacy, and the surest means of advocating high school athletics is as an important component - but just a component - of high school **activities**. Essential are knowledge of the educational value of activities plus an organizational model that sends a clear message to students, parents, staff and community that **all** high school activities, not just athletics, are, based on their educational merits, a vital part of the school program.

Activities are not difficult to defend. Two facts are particulary helpful. First, numerous studies (The National Federation of State High School Associations, 1986; Haensly, Lupkowski, and Edlind, 1985-86; Spitzner, 1986; The Minnesota State High School League, 1985) confirm that activities participants perform better in the classroom than their non-activities counterparts. Participants not only get better grades, they also have better attandance and are involved in fewer discipline problems. Second, they do their BEST academic work during the seasons in which they participate (Stoltz, 1984).

In addition to organizing and advocating for activities, the

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non-activities portion of the school program needs to model participatory principles. In a school organized so that cooperation, collaboration, and participation are the norms, coaches and advisors can be expected to organize their programs so as to produce the same results. If, however, staff, parents, and students are not meaningfully involved in a school's management, it is unlikely they will have much input into activities, either. Even when coaches/advisors work in empowering settings - like schools with site-based management plans - some will find it difficult to empower their participants. They will be further discouraged from implementing democratic principles if their organizational models, especially the activities department, are authoritarian.

The question, of course, is why apply democratic principles to activities management? After all, most participants are minors. It's one thing for adults to share power with each other, quite another for adults to share power with children! Furthermore, most co-curricular activities are highly competitive rather than cooperative. They are not equal opportunity experiences. They favor the most talented. Shouldn't their organizing prinicple reflect their basic inequality? A related question is whether sharing power isn't a sign of weakness, something certainly to be avoided, especially in athletics. Finally, one must ask why coaches and advisors would tamper with a system that has for so long been so good for kids by modifying what has been one of its distinct characteristics, top-down

management? It seems not to be broken, so, of course, why fix it? The answer to these questions is that the application of participatory management principles to co-curricular activities is, for practical and theoretical reasons, the right thing to do.

When coaches and advisors understand the reasons why participatory principles are right for their programs, they will become not just willing but enthusiastic practitioners. Thus principals and activities directors need to assume the responsiblity for educating their co-curricular leaders about the merits of democratic management. In recent years, activities in-service programs have focused on injury liability, fund raising and booster clubs, weight training, eligibility and transfer rules, and coaches' certification requirements, all important and timely topics. The need for, power of, and skills involved in participatory management are at least as relevant today.

The single greatest barrier to the implementation of participatory principles in activities is the widely held but grossly inaccurate image of activities, particularly athletics, as the last bastion of discipline in a rapidly deteriorating society, responsible for mirroring the dog-eat-dog competitive struggles students will face when they are turned out into the 'real world' of business. Like most simplistic explanations, it contains just enough truth to be attractive and just enough misinformation to be dangerous. True, business has never been more competitive. As John Welch, General Electric's CEO said recently, "The pace of change in the Nireties will make the

Eighties look like a picnic - a walk in the park. Competition will be relentless (Fortune, p. 30)." However, in the same article, Welch adds that the way to respond to competitive pressures is to create a corporate culture based on full participation, definitely not "the top-down measures that we took (p.30)." Rather, says Welch, GE will try to "communicate more clearly, and involve everyone in a focused effort to serve ever more demanding customers (p. 30)."

Including Welch, Fortune's 60th anniversary addition (March 26, 1990) contains interviews with 50 world leaders representing management, science, finance, economics, media and marketing, global politics, and society. In introducing these leaders' observations, the editors note that, "Successful companies will constantly learn and adapt...It means delivering on the promise of participatory management, allowing employees a say in how the organization is designed, how work is assigned, how they are compensated (p. 15)." In Fortune's dog-eat-dog scenario, the tallest dogs are collaborating! Why? Accoring to the editors, "The latest studies of business show that providing workers with a sense of participation increases productivity far more than incentive pay. Turning employees loose to figure out the best way to do the job can lead to double-digit surges in output (p.15)."

When coaches and advisors understand that empowering workers is the business principle of the 90's **because it is highly motivational and produces enhanced performance,** two good things

happen. First, as a business prinicple, empowerment gains credibility. It becomes 'real world' stuff, diffused of connotations of societal and/or administrative weakness. Second, because of its performance enhancing potential, empowerment gains value. It's not just good for participants, it's also good for coaches and advisors. Bringing about that understanding needs to be the essence of the activities administrator's in-service effort.

Rueben Mark, Colgate-Polmolive's CEO thinks:

> The essence of business as we move into the 21st century is going to be tapping the talent of good people. It's not about where you locate the plants, it's how you locate the best people and motivate them. How do you trust them and have them trust you.
>
> It's certainly not easy, but communication and bridging cultural gaps is the top priority. You've got to be honest and straightforward: What you tell the outside world has to be the same thing you tell your factory workers. Pardon the high school coach stuff, but if everyone is working on a team basis and sees a specific set of goals, it's going to happen. The one-man band doesn't exist. (p.32)

Unfortunately, what Mark identifies as "high school coach stuff," too often isn't. In the best programs, though, it is.

Dick Hanson is one of Minnesota's most successful high school football coaches. His Burnsville Braves (Class AA, enrollment 2300) have won four (4) State Championships and are

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perennial contenders for the prestigious Lake Red Conference title. For the past seven (7) years (he's been head coach since 1969), Dick has allowed his players to design plays, and, when they have one they believe in, they coach it, too. It's not unusual for a Burnsville quarterback to grab the chalk and go to the board with well thought out, meticulous suggestions for changes in pass routes - even during playoff games. "We have a lot of fun with it," he says, "It gives them a sense of ownership." Coach Hanson believes in listening to his players. Coach Hanson hasn't given in. He's not part of the problem. Quite the contrary! According to Peters and Waterman, he's on exactly the right course. As they point out, there is no more common theme among the excellent companies they observed than, **"respect for the individual** (In Search of Excellence, p. 238)." Excellent organizations:

> Treat people as adults. Treat them as partners; treat them with respect. Treat **them** - not captial spending and automation - as the primary source of productivity gains. These are the fundamental lessons from the excellent companies research. In other words, if you want productivity and the financial reward that goes with it, you must treat your workers as your most important asset. (p.238)

Substitute **X's and O's** for **capital spending and automation** and **wins** for **financial reward** and the previous passage provides ample practical justification for participatory management in

activities.

If Dick Hanson ever tires of coaching and teaching (Let's hope for Burnsville's sake, he never does!), he would do well to contact IBM. He's their kind of manager. Coach Hanson's willingness to **listen** to players is reminiscent of Tom Watson, Sr.'s Open Door Policy. When Mr. Watson, the company's founder, was in charge, "every employee at IBM had the right to go directly to the company's chief executive officer, that is, to Watson, to complain, to suggest improvements, and to be heard - and this is still IBM practice (Drucker, p. 283)." Why? Because Mr. Watson knew that, "The worker...knew far better than anyone else how to improve productivity and quality (Drucker, p. 283)."

Mr. Watson and Coach Hanson are practicing what has come to be widely (though incorrectly!) known as Japanese management. If what coaches and advisors are seeking is a productivity advantantage, it's the kind of management they too should adopt. Peters and Waterman explain it this way:

> The productivity proposition is not so esoterically Japanese as it is simply human...loyalty, commitment through effective training, personal identification with the company's success and, most simply, the human relationship between the employee and his supervisor. (p. 39)

There are reasons beyond effectiveness for adapting participatory strategies to activities, however, and they are as, if not more, important. Analogies from business, useful as they are, don't get at these. School programs ought to have positive

educational outcomes - as the research shows that activities do. They ought, also, to mirror school values. Democratic management does so.

Collaboratively managed activities make a statement about what former Washington senator Daniel Evans calls America's "free marketplace of commerce and ideas (p. 634)." Activities so organized model American values and become in effect citizenship internships for their participants.

In addition to modeling democratic principles, participatory activities are more likely to teach both responsibility and creativity. According to Rosabeth Moss Kanter:

> In the traditional bureaucratic corportation, roles were so circumscribed that most relationships tended to be rather formal and impersonal. Narrowly defined jobs constricted by rules and procedures also tended to stifle initiative and creativity, and the atmosphere was emotionally repressive. The post-entreprenuerial corporation, in contrast, with its stress on teamwork and cooperation, with its encouragement of imagination and commitment to the process of building the new, brings people closer together, making the personal dimension of relationships more important. (p. 280)

What Kanter describes as the "traditional bureaucratic corporation" is analogous to autocratically managed activities. What she describes as "the post-entreprenuerial corporation" is analogous to democratically managed activities. Clearly, the

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former has damaging educational outcomes, the latter positive educational outcomes. In a recent address to Fortune's "Corporate Communications Seminar," William Oliver argued that the entire 'Quality Revolution' can be reduced to three simple principles. Rule number three states that people in successful organizations "seek continuous improvement for themselves and for their organization (p. 627)." Continuous improvement means continuous learning -- which means continuous education. Not surprisingly, he describes successful organizations as those in which everyone, regardless of their role, is a committed partner in the enterprise. (p. 627)

Finally, democratically managed activities are consistent with research on effective schools. According to Glen Robinson:

> In our nation's history, we have progressed through three distinct Eras in our learning expectancy for students. In Era I, we expected a little learning from many students. In Era II, it was much learning from some students. But today, in Era III, we expect much learning from all students. (p. 3)

Regardless of where one draws the lines between Era I and Era II, there certainly are parallels between education in general and activities in particular. Not long ago activities meant sports, and sports meant boys' sports. Today the scope of activities is comprehensive and inclusive. Not long ago learners were considered good or poor. Today learners are identified as fast or slow. Everyone can AND MUST learn; that's what school is

about. Activities have to keep pace with that change in attitude. This is not to imply that all activities particpants will have the same experience. Just as there are differences between classroom learners to which their teachers must attend, so also will activities participants be at different levels of development.

Performance and practice roles will and should continue to be defined by developmental differences. What must be eradicated where they still persist, though, are leadership practices that confuse participants about their personal worth. "Role player" is too often interpreted as "bad player," and it's too small a step from "bad player" to "bad person." Every participant must have the same high quality educational experience, regardless of role. Every participant's esteem must be enhanced by activities. If activities leaders can accomplish this mission, their programs are justified. If not, they are inappropriate in an educational setting. Without question, the most likely means of attaining the desired outcome is the implementation of participatory practices which by definition are inclusive of and respectful of every individual.

Donald Ephlin, recently retired vice president of the United Auto Workers, recognizes both the difficulty and the rewards associated with participatory models when he says, "No question, it's harder to manage in a participative system than it is to be a dictator, but it's far more effective (Fortune, p. 37)."

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